

## LGBTs twice as likely to smoke, study says

In a recent statistical analysis by the California Department of Health Services, a startling trend was revealed. LGBT people are two times more likely to smoke than the overall population of California. The smoking prevalence in the queer community was over 30 percent, according to the CDHS results of a population-based study. The highest smoking rates were among LGBT youth ages 18 to 24 at 44 percent, which is two and a half times the overall smoking rate for this age group.

"These studies show marked disparities among California's communities and confirm that we must continue our efforts so all of our communities can avoid the disease and death caused by tobacco addiction," said Sandra Shewry, director of CDHS.

Shewry said that the population-specific data are in stark contrast to the state's overall smoking prevalence, which is at historic lows.

A higher incidence of smoking was also noted among Korean men, at 27.9 percent, even though the Korean population had an overall smoking rate of 15.3 percent.

The statewide average of smokers is 15.4 percent, according to the data. The high rate of LGBT smokers, however, is a concern to those seeking to get people to kick the habit.

Smoking has long been glorified in the community, and one reason is that tobacco companies have targeted gay markets for years. Project SCUM (Sub-Culture Urban Marketing) is one example. During the 1990s with the advent of the Kamel Red cigarette brand, tobacco company RJ Reynolds launched Project SCUM in order to target gay people. The documents were made public in 1998 and are available at [www.projectscum.org](http://www.projectscum.org), a Web site developed by the Legacy Foundation. RJ Reynolds' campaign highlighted trends in gay culture in the Castro and detailed ways in which smoking could be introduced and glorified in the LGBT population.

Bob Gordon, director of the California LGBT Tobacco Education Partnership, noted that tobacco companies, like any savvy industry, study people and use a community's culture against it.

"One thing that I know for sure is that the tobacco industry has a deadly track record of singling out the queer community in order to maximize its market share." Gordon said.

He also said that homophobia also plays a part in the community's higher smoking rates.

"LGBT people live in a world where most are routinely denied civil rights, which includes discrimination in terms of employment, housing, credit, tax, inheritance benefits, and the right to adopt children, to marry, and to serve in the military," Gordon explained. "Such homophobia – along with racism and sexism – contribute to higher substance abuse, especially in LGBT communities of color.

"Cigarettes are used for emotional support," Gordon added.

One way of creating a solution is advocating awareness and education about the health effects of tobacco use, which includes cancer and other diseases. Gordon, whose office is in the LGBT Community Center, works daily with individuals and other nonprofits to get the word out about smoking in the queer community.

To register for a free smoking cessation class call (415) 339-STOP or visit [www.lastdrag.org](http://www.lastdrag.org). For more information visit [www.lgbtpartnership.org](http://www.lgbtpartnership.org).